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Dissertation on variola

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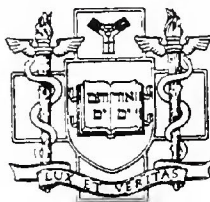
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Dissertations
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XIII.

Dissertation
on
Variola.

By

William Strickler McCorkle,
of Columbia, Pennsylvania,
Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Medicine.

Varicella

In selecting a subject for an inaugural dissertation. I have been influenced in a great degree, by the fact, that during the past summer whilst residing in the place of my nativity,

I had frequent opportunities of studying the character and symptoms of Small Pox which then prevailed as an epidemic, and of observing the treatment which seemed best calculated to remove the disease —

If in treating the subject, I offer nothing new, but merely travel over an already well beaten path, the fact of my being a tyro in science, must prove my apology —

It is my design to commence my essay with a hasty outline of the history of the disease, and to follow with some ^{remarks} on its character, symptoms, prognosis, method of cure, together with a few remarks on the prophylactic effects of vaccination. With this slight introduction I will now proceed; —

There appears to be great contrariety of opinion in

the minds of authors, as regards the period at which this affection, first made its appearance in the world, - Whilst some suppose it to have been known to the early Greek Physicians, others with equal confidence advocate a contrary opinion, - Without entering into the merits of the various opinions advanced, we will proceed to a point in which all appear to agree - that the first distinct history of the disease which we have, has been given to us by Rhazes, who obtained this knowledge upon the subject, from the writings of ancient Arabian physicians, whose works however have not reached the present day - It is known that the disease existed and spread throughout the east propagated by the armies of Mahomet in the seventh century, and became then known in countries, to which it had hitherto been a stranger, - The Crusaders also were the means of spreading this pestilence widely; for after the wars against the Saracens were concluded Small pox, was disseminated over Europe. -

During the 13th century, it became known in England from thence was first introduced into our Country, soon after its settlement, where it has prevailed occasionally ever since its first introduction. —

This disease owes its origin to a peculiar Contagion; about 10 or 12 days after being exposed to this contagion the patient perceives the first symptoms of the disease. He is affected by chilliness, followed by fever. Pain in the head and back, pain in the stomach increased on pressure and general lassitude — Small pox has been divided by pathologists into two varieties, viz distinct & Confluent; In distinct small pox the pustules are distinct in their character, each surrounded by an inflamed border, and a diffused redness of a much paler hue;

In the confluent variety these pustules coalesce or run into each other, frequently covering the face and other parts of the body, with one continuous crust or scab. — When a patient is attacked with distinct small pox after the existence of fever for three or four days

minute red spots make their appearance on the face
afterwards on the neck and other parts of the body;
about the end of the second or commencement of the 3rd day,
these spots become small vesicles filled with a thin
serous fluid, after some days this vesicle changes its
character into a pustule, and is distended by a purulent
fluid, this change occurs about the eighth or ninth day
when maturation is fully completed, in a few days
these pustules dry and form scabs which soon fall off
frequently leaving the patient covered with pits;

When the eruption first makes its appearance
the face begins to swell, which in general subsides
after the eruption is complete - In this variety of
small pox the eruption fever is usually mild in its
character and is ushered in by a cold stage, evacuations
of feces occur for three or four days - the patient
has a tongue covered with a white fur, generally
some soreness of the throat & inflammation of the bronchia,
but after the subsidence of the fever these symptoms
usually abate & the patient becomes convalescent. -

The Confluent form of this disease
is usually preceded by a violent eruption fever, attended

by great general disturbance of the system, the pain in the head, back and limbs is much more severe than in the distinct variety, the gastric uneasiness is increased - frequently pain in the pit of the stomach & vomiting are present, the eyes are more swollen and watery - the voice husky and all the symptoms of bronchial irritation are present & much increased; - frequently the tongue and fauces are covered with the eruption incident to the disease, sometimes in persons of weak and debilitated habits the fever assumes a typhus character, when this state occurs the danger of the patient is manifestly increased; -

In forming our prognosis we are regulated by the form and violence in which the disease appears, in the distinct small pox occurring in a healthy subject but little danger need be apprehended, but even in this form persons of delicate constitutions or those of an inflammatory habit, often suffer severely and their cases terminate fatally;

In the confluent form, as has already been observed, the danger is much greater.

The most unfavorable results may be expected, when we 4
find the patient laboring under a high grade of
fever with affections of the brain, lungs, or
bronchia, producing delirium or difficulty of
breathing. On the contrary however when we
find the mind composed, with a soft yielding
pulse, the tongue and fauces free from pustules
the breathing natural, we may form a more
favorable opinion: —

The specific character³
of this contagion is of such a nature, that it is
communicable by the mother to the foetus in utero.
Well attested instances have been recorded, in which
this fact is proved, & it is probable many of those
who appear insusceptible to attacks of this disease,
may have already had it in that manner, —

It is also asserted that the foetus may have
the disease whilst in the womb of a mother
who had previously passed through the disease, and
was at the time free from infection. —

Like most of the exanthemata, Smallpox
usually occurs but once in the system; but cases

of Secondary small pox sometimes occur, generally of a modified character:—

When called to a patient laboring under the disease our efforts should be directed to moderate inflammatory action, sometimes in persons of a plethoric habit, we find it useful to bleed, but in general, as far as my own experience has gone, this is not required in a majority of cases—

A free circulation of fresh air, the entire absence of every thing that can tend to increase the animal heat— Keeping the bowels open, by the use of laxatives, Sul. Mur. Hyd, & the refrigerating salts, the use of antimonials, regulated diet, and the free use of cold water internally and externally, has been all that has been found necessary— to carry a patient safely through an attack of the distinct small pox, —

When of a confluent form, attended attended with high inflammatory excitement—

I have used the lancet with much advantage, both in restoring the suffering of the patient at the time and moderating the crop. For as a general rule,

the means taken to reduce the heat of the surface 5
were always attended by a correspondent diminution
of the crop of pustules - When the bronchia were
affected, after proper depletion, the use of
stimulating expectorants, and mucilaginous
drinks was attended with advantage;

During the existence of the disease last spring
in Columbia Pa, it was my fortune to attend
about 40 cases of the disease, several of which
were cases of virulent confluent small pox -
and they all recovered under the above plan of
treatment, with the exception of a single case:
" (I had forgotten to say that the disease in some of my
" patients assumed a low type which required the
" use of cordials before their convalescence was fully established)

The only fatal case referred to occurred in a broken
down individual, who had just recovered from an attack
of Mania a potu - In this individual, the fever
was typhus from the commencement, & the eruption
instead of preserving the usual character resembled
petechia, The whole surface was covered with these
spots, varying in size from a grain of shot, to that of a dollar

The patient after lingering a few days died of gangrene of the lungs.— The only disease with which Small pox can be confounded is Variella or Chicken pox— In this latter disease the symptoms are in general less violent, and the pox runs through its course with greater rapidity, The only strong diagnostic difference is however, in the appearance of the pustule, which is more attended with the central depression which is found in the Small pox pustule,—

A modified form of Small pox called Varioloid sometimes prevails occurring after Vaccination or previous Small pox, but as this disease differs in nothing from genuine Small pox, excepting in being of a milder ~~form~~ character & as the same general treatment is necessary for its removal, it is unnecessary to say any thing further,

Since the discovery of vaccination by the immortal Jenner in 1798, this disease which was previously one of the most fatal incident to humanity, has been shown of its destructive properties,

It is seldom at the present day that we meet with individuals whose countenances are marked with the marks of this destroyer of beauty. When ineffectual in totally eradicating all susceptibility to disease, it exerts a modifying influence, and when Small pox does attack, its inroads are less violent and more easily counteracted by medical treatment;—

That its will in a majority of cases, when effectually practiced operate as entire preservations, I fully believe. Knowing that many who have been exposed extensively to contagion, owe their exemption to this cause alone;—

A single instance I will mention of its efficacy, drawn from personal observation—

One of the earliest cases of Small pox, I witnessed was in a family of five children, none of whom had been previously vaccinated; As soon as the character of the affection was known, the remaining members of the family were immediately and carefully vaccinated & notwithstanding the poverty of the family compelling all to occupy the same apartment, the disease was confined to

a single instance, Indeed from the readiness with which the progress of the disease was arrested in Columbia, by the adoption of general vaccination, my confidence in its efficacy as a prophylactic has been fully established. —

I have now very imperfectly completed the task I assigned myself at the time and with a further apology for the imperfections of my effort I take my leave of the subject; —

W. S. McKello

New Haven Jan 16th 1844

Yale Medical College

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